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# DOUBTS IN MOSCOW ON BRITON'S DEATH

Couple Say That Banker in Fall  
Spoke of Spy in Embassy  
— Inquest to Resume

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Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Oct. 2 — Shortly before 9 A.M. on June 17, Dennis G. Skinner, a 54-year-old British banker, was found dead after a fall to the sidewalk from his 12th-story apartment on Moscow's Leninsky Prospekt.

Accounts of the incident that circulated in the British community here at the time suggested it was a suicide, possibly related to loneliness and depression brought on by 15 years' work in Moscow.

But today a British couple living here disclosed to reporters that two days before his death Mr. Skinner approached them with a note that said he knew of a spy for the Soviet Union in the British Embassy and that his life was in danger. The existence of the note was then confirmed by sources at the British Embassy, who said it had been forwarded to authorities in England for presentation at the inquest into Mr. Skinner's death.

The couple who received the note about the purported spy, William and Valerie Cane, as well as other friends of Mr. Skinner, have offered other corroborative details, including an account of his discussions with embassy officials about the spy allegation. Embassy officials confirmed such discussions took place.

## Inquest to Be Resumed

Questions about Mr. Skinner's death increased with the publication Saturday of a report in The Daily Express of London that said the British inquest into Mr. Skinner's death, opened and adjourned in July, would be resumed behind closed doors. The newspaper implied that the order to hold the hearing in camera had come from one of Britain's top security agencies, M.I.5 or M.I.6.

A later report in another London paper, The Sunday Telegraph, said the inquest would be resumed in the London suburb of Croydon next month, but that the Home Office had not determined whether it would be closed or not.

As a result of the disclosures, friends of the banker here say they are no longer sure whether his death was a case of a disturbed man who killed himself or whether there were cloak-and-dagger aspects to the affair.

## Meets With Embassy Officials

According to the accounts given today, on the eve of his death, about 20 hours after writing his note saying there was a spy in the embassy, Mr. Skinner had a lengthy meeting with David J. Ratford, the embassy's second-ranking official, and with John Burnett, the embassy's security chief.

Concern about Soviet penetration of the Foreign Office has been an issue in Britain for more than 30 years, since a succession of defections of highly placed Soviet spies that included Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and H.A.R. (Kim) Philby.

Mr. Skinner, who was the chief representative of the Midland Bank, one of Britain's largest financial institutions, precipitated the events that are now under investigation on the afternoon of June 15, when he arrived in a distraught state at the apartment of the Canes, a British couple living in the same building.

The couple said today that Mr. Skinner handed Mrs. Cane a note saying he feared he would be arrested that evening by Soviet guards outside the British Embassy when he attended a reception. He asked that British officials be alerted to help him and added, according to the Canes' account, that he knew that there was "a spy in the embassy."

"Please do this for me or I'm a dead man," the banker added, according to the Canes.

Mr. Skinner was not arrested, and he discussed the matter with Mr. Burnett, the security officer, at the reception, according to Mr. Cane and another British business representative who was at the reception. Arrangements were made for him to spend the night with another member of the embassy staff, and he returned to the embassy the following morning for further talks with Mr. Ratford and Mr. Burnett.

According to an embassy source, the two officials suggested that he move up the date of his departure from Moscow on vacation, scheduled for June 20, but Mr. Skinner said that he thought it better not to arouse Soviet suspicions by changing his plans. The same accounts say he gave the same reason for declining an embassy offer to provide him with a companion for the following days.

## British Doctor Views Body

The banker's death followed within 24 hours. He was found by his Soviet driver, a sweater pulled over his head. A British Embassy doctor was permitted to view the body at a Soviet morgue on June 24, and according to an embassy source concluded that the visible injuries were consistent with "judicial hanging," which the doctor was said to have described as consistent with his neck having struck a railing of one of the apartment block's balconies as he fell.

Friends of the banker claim that a number of factors militate against the theory that Mr. Skinner was depressed and took his own life. They note that he had a ticket for his Moscow-London flight on June 20 and that he had spoken eagerly of his coming vacation with his Russian-born wife and the couple's two children, who were living in Britain.

Against this, there are other acquaintances who paint a picture of Mr. Skinner as a loner who seemed, at least in his last months, to be underworked. He was to have been replaced as Midland's representative in September, and he told friends that he looked forward to the move.